



COUNCILMEMBER DONNA FRYE

City of San Diego
Sixth District

MEMORANDUM

DATE: June 30, 2003

TO: Jim Madaffer, Chair, Natural Resources and Culture Committee

FROM: Councilmember Donna Frye *Donna Frye*

SUBJECT: Personal Watercraft Use in Mission Bay Park

In order to protect recreational water users, water quality, shore birds, fish populations, and eelgrass beds in Mission Bay from the impacts of personal watercraft (PWC), I respectfully request that you docket the matter of personal watercraft use in Mission Bay at a future meeting of the Natural Resources and Culture Committee.

I propose that the following be included for discussion:

- Separating personal watercraft users from other recreational water users;
- Establishing a buffer zone around all swim areas, designated Least Tern nesting sites, wildlife preserves and eelgrass mitigation areas;
- Requiring all personal watercraft operated on Mission Bay to meet the California Environmental Protection Agency Air Resources Board's marine engine emission regulations.

The regulation of PWC use in Mission Bay is well within the discretion of the City Council. PWC pose a serious safety threat to other recreational water users in Mission Bay. According to the United States Coast Guard, 70 percent of all reported boating accidents in Mission Bay from 1995 to 1999 involved PWC. According to a City Manager report on this issue in July of 2000, 80 percent of reported accidents in Mission Bay involved PWC. Establishing a buffer zone around all swim areas and separating personal watercraft from other boaters, paddlers and rowers will help reduce impacts and safety threats.

PWC are also known to pollute our recreational waters, which is one of the reasons that their use has been restricted in many of our nation's most beautiful parks and marine sanctuaries. PWC are not simply smaller motorboats; rather, they are specialty craft designed specifically for high-speed recreational use. In March 1995, a Federal Appeals Court upheld PWC regulations in the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary. The court agreed with an amicus brief filed by the Center for Marine Conservation that the regulations were necessary and reasonable to reduce potential conflicts between competing recreational uses in the sanctuary, and to protect marine life.

According to the California Air Resources Board (CARB), two-stroke carbureted engines discharge an unburned fuel/oil mixture at levels approaching 20 to 30 percent of the fuel/oil mixture consumed. A typical personal watercraft consuming 5 gallons of gasoline per hour and operated 41 hours, discharges between 50 and 60 gallons of unburned gasoline into the environment.

According to CARB, PWC (with conventional two-stroke engines) operated for 7 hours produce more smog-forming emissions than a 1998 passenger car driven for 100,000 miles. Requiring all PWC in Mission Bay to meet CARB emission regulations for new marine engines (such as the standards in place in Lake Tahoe) would help improve water quality in Mission Bay.

PWC pose a greater threat to the marine environment than other two-strokes because they are capable of traveling in shallow and remote areas. Hydrocarbons in gas and oil released from two-stroke motors float on the surface and settle within the shallow ecosystems of water bodies. Scientists from the University of Stockholm (U. Tjarnlund, G. Ericson, E. Lindesjoo, L. Peterson and L. Balk, Institute of Applied Research) have determined that hydrocarbon pollution bioaccumulates within the complex food web, posing a serious threat to the marine environment.

Mission Bay has a RARE beneficial use designation that requires extra protection of endangered species such as the brown pelican and Least Tern. Requiring appropriate buffer zones for PWC use in areas near wildlife preserves, Least Tern nesting sites and eelgrass mitigation areas would help reduce the impacts from oil and gas pollution in our near shore environments.

A discussion of PWC use in Mission Bay is in keeping with the goal of the Mission Bay Park Master Plan and Natural Resources Management Plan to protect and preserve Mission Bay's natural resources and compatible recreational opportunities. Additionally, the Grand Jury recently issued a report titled "Polluting Just For the Fun Of It: Two-Stroke Engines on Mission Bay" recommending the City Council take action on this issue. The Grand Jury report states, "Direct the designated stewards of Mission Bay to apply the local ordinances concerning the polluting effects of the two-stroke engine PWCs on the environment of Mission Bay and cite the violators, or if it is necessary, enact new ordinances to achieve the same result."

I respectfully request that this item be docketed at your earliest convenience at the Natural Resources and Culture Committee and that staff prepare a report (including updated boating accident reports) for discussion at the time that this matter is heard.

DF/mm

cc: Mayor Murphy
Councilmembers
Michael Uberuaga, City Manager
Ellen Oppenheim, Director, Park and Recreation Department
Jeff Bowman, Fire Chief